



GRIMANESA AMORÓS
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Grimanesa Amorós's works felt like the stuff of science fiction the first time I encountered them, bursting with light in a nearly dark room. The artist intends for her viewers to have a visceral experience with her art; she's creating a sublime effect, "an immersive environment" she says, involving the sculptures and the light around them.¹ She wants the viewer to have a complete tangible experience. While the artist layers her installations with numerous references to the physicality of light and to her Peruvian home, they also invoke her reverence for natural events and spaces, like the aurora borealis she had seen in Iceland and tidal flows reminiscent of the oceans and lakes in her native Peru.

In *Light Between the Islands*, Amorós combines solid bubble forms on the floor in groupings, like islands surrounded by water in the space between them. Here those gaps allow the viewer to ambulate the bubble forms. The bubbles are animated with LEDs, light programming, and video animation partially illuminating the gallery space. Her sculptures are often layered with her drawings, as is the case with this installation, where they have been silkscreened onto the surface of the mounds. Making the connection between the artist's memories and fantasies of Peru, she's added *MIRANDA*, a video work. It is a hybrid film, merging and uniting images of the artist's face. On her face, she's rendered Incan sun masks and ancient Incan monuments. She's also added views of sea foam percolating along the Peruvian coast.

Amorós's material is nature's light, which she mentions repeatedly in interviews and in her writings, acknowledging how important it has been as an artistic influence. Fauve painter André Derain famously remarked, "*The substance of painting is light.*" Light for Amorós is both a tool and a subject. It has certain specific references to her Peruvian homeland where she was mesmerized by the bioluminescent sea foam she could easily view a short distance from her home in coastal Lima. Hers is a light emanating from nature, which she crafted with technology, which, as she says, "brings the magic I was looking for [in my art]."² Light in its range of forms appeals to Amorós. By combining nature and technology, she engages with it in its reflected,

¹ Grimanesa Amorós, e-mail message to author, June 3, 2014.

² Ibid.

projected, refracted, substance-less, visible, atmospheric, glowing, and shining forms.

Amorós often uses water forms and symbols as a way to embody the light. Light moves in waves, much like the ocean. Water has within it the “source and origin” of life, according to renowned religion historian Mircea Eliade, a similar feature in all the cultures he examined. Sea foam, or *espuma del mar*, has a significant role in Peruvian history, as Viracocha the great creator deity of the Incan cosmology, emerged from the ocean. Sea foam is a reference to this god. Almost in a divine guise, Amorós plays with solidity/materiality and ethereality/spirituality in her sculptures, making the individual elements defy conventional expectations about form. The unfolding light sequence of the sculptures diffuses their solidity, while also defining the linear progression of the narrative within her work.

Others have similarly perceived Peru as a source of psychic power. Literary historian Verónica Salles-Reese notes that there are perceived geographic sites of energy: “these spots are imaginatively endowed with a numinous essence. Lake Titicaca is such a place.”³ Amorós draws upon this sense of the sacred as a way to add a layer of ethereality and the intangible to her art—the unseen yet known, much like the energy and heat of unseen light. Another layer is a reference to water symbolism in Amorós’s art are references to the highly eccentric Uros practice of weaving homes, structures, and even the ground on which they live from *totoras* which are local reeds. The Uros, a pre-Incan civilization of Lake Titicaca, crafted these floating islands, structures, and boats, a defensive practice to escape the invading Incans. Islands have a special place in the imagination; Eliade remarked that one of the strongest images of creation “is the island that suddenly manifests itself in the midst of the waves.”⁴ Amorós’s works engage the archetype of fabricating, embodying the mystery of creation resembling plant or geological clusters. Additionally, they also engage with the archetype of water; the emergence of the sea foam carries within it the alchemical transition of elusive water into a physical substance with form.

All these references to nature have within them the idea of abundance. It is this expansiveness which is, perhaps, the most compelling feature of Amorós’s art. While the physical situation in the gallery space is fixed and finite, the variety of light images she creates make the surface of her works into a seemingly infinite number of appearances. Though produced through careful study and meticulous production, the cellular and atomized forms remind us of the plentifulness of bubbles and reeds, as well as suggesting the flow of matter through veins and arteries. In thinking about abundance in Amorós’s art, I am reminded of philosophy professor Rosalyn Diprose’s estimation that generosity is a life force, noting that passion animates and energizes

³ Verónica Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha to the Virgin of Copacabana: History of the Representation of the Sacred* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1997), 5.

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc., 1987), 134.

our interactions, such as the exchange of the artist creating an experience for the viewer.⁵ Diprose takes a line from German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as her defining feature of generosity in corporeal terms: "I love most what is written in blood." She then notes that even metaphorically, "We do not have to write *about* the body, its gestures, cells, and fluids, to write *in* blood." This idea relates to Amorós's art in the way that a life force like blood seems to emanate from within them, even though the artist has not "written" about flesh or innards. As a defiance of the separation between each of us, through the technological apparatus of her use of light and its affect, her work presents a sense of sublime plentitude that is always welcomed.

⁵ See "Conclusion" of Diprose's book. [Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2002), 189-196].